

FIRE DEPARTMENT FACTS

Nightly Interesting Information Elicited at the Meeting of Underwriters.

Chief Webster Makes a Statement—His Appeal to the Board of Public Safety—No Voice in the Appearances.

The local board of underwriters and the State board held an important meeting yesterday at the local board's headquarters. The matter under consideration was the alleged inefficient condition of the Indianapolis fire department.

The action of the subject was caused by the numerous destructive fires that have recently run away with the department and wiped out hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of property.

Chief Engineer Webster, who had been invited to be present, contributed some valuable information.

The meeting was presided over by Robert Zener. The early stages of the meeting were marked by a somewhat sensational commotion, when one of the Democratic members attempted to run it into politics. L. D. Moody, a local underwriter, as soon as the purpose was stated, sprang to his feet and moved an adjournment. He denounced the proposed investigation as a Republican scheme to drag the fire department into politics. By the application of ice-water and a little persuasion Mr. Moody's agitation was allayed, and he became more tractable.

Chief Engineer Webster, of the opinion that the Board of Safety was the only means of relief and the proper body to appeal to, and was opposed to betraying a condition of affairs that might be damaging to business and insurance interests.

A BIT OF SUPPLEMENTED NEWS.

Mr. Kassmann had in his inside pocket a paper which had an important bearing upon the matter at issue, the contents of which he did not object to laying before the meeting, but he preferred that it should go no further at present. This paper was a copy of a communication which Chief Webster submitted to the Board of Public Safety on the 11th of September. In this communication Chief Webster laid before the Board of Safety the condition of the fire department and its needs, and requested the board to take such action as it might deem proper.

At this point it was suggested that the motion of Mr. Moody to adjourn was still pending. By this time the latter had become convinced that the fire department was in a bad state of affairs, and he withdrew his motion to adjourn.

On motion of Mr. Zener the meeting then proposed to Chief Webster that he elaborate his description of the condition of the fire department and his plan for its reorganization.

Chief Webster stated that all that had been said as to the deficiency of the department was true, and that the reality of the city should have ten engines in efficient working order, and that if the full requirements of the city were not met, the city would be in a bad state of affairs. He stated that with only three engines at a time, and that if two dangerous fires should break out at once the consequences would be unpleasant to contemplate. With ten engines, however, the department could very cleverly handle two dangerous fires at a time, and the same time, or even three, and he stated that he would recommend that at least one of the new engines purchased from the city should be a half steam on top of the highest building of the city. Five thousand feet of hose, furthermore, was not sufficient, but five thousand feet would be. The amount of additional hose really needed was ten thousand feet, certainly not less than seven thousand feet.

WEBSTER HAS NO VOICE.

Mr. Moody asked Chief Webster if he had any objections to the morale or personnel of the fire department, and he replied he had not. Other gentlemen present questioned the chief as to his authority to select, hire and discharge men. The chief replied that by Mr. Webster that he had no authority to hire a man or discharge one; that he had no right to recommend one either for employment or dismissal. He might suspend a man for five days, but he had no authority to suspend him for more than five days, but that was the limit of his authority.

There was nothing in the report of Chief Webster that could be construed into criticism of the Board of Public Safety, but the conclusions drawn from his representations were that the fire department was in a bad state of affairs, and that a good portion of the money expended in the line could be much more profitably expended on the other.

On motion a committee of six, three from the State board of underwriters and three from the local board, was appointed to confer with the Board of Public Safety and the Council on the department's needs. The members of the committee on the part of the State board are H. H. Friedman, John C. Ingram and William H. Fulton; on the part of the local board, J. C. Spence, C. F. Sayles and Robert Zener, the latter being chairman.

Chief Webster was requested by the committee to make a statement of the condition of the fire department, and another statement as to its needs, and he said he would do it.

Arrangements were also made for a meeting Saturday night with the finance committee of the City of Indianapolis. The condition of the department will be presented by Chief Webster to the Council at its meeting Monday night, upon which occasion Mr. Zener will also take occasion to wash his hands of the responsibility of a possible disastrous conflagration that may occur, at any time as a result of the department's crippled condition.

NOT A POLITICAL MATTER.

There were about fifty members present at the underwriters' meeting yesterday. A reporter of the Journal talked, yesterday afternoon, with a number of those who were present. Every one who was seen

scouted the idea that there was any politics in it. "If it had been intended," said one, "to make a political mess of it," said another, "it would have been sprung in time." The meeting was simply a business affair. The agitation was prompted purely to secure protection, to keep insurance rates down and to save insurance companies from disastrous losses.

Another member of the conference stated that the present insurance rates in Indianapolis were based upon the presumption that the city had the best protection in the way of a fire department that was possible to procure. No notice had as yet been given of a raise in rates, but the recent heavy losses were creating some commotion and inquiry in insurance circles. Another member said that the condition of the Indianapolis fire department was known in insurance headquarters, inside of a week's time, and would be taken either to raise rates or cancel policies.

GEOGRAPHY-PLACES.

President Frenzel, who lives on the East Washington and Illinois street electric line, has a fascinating habit of running the line just about as they please, regardless of

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"The North Indianapolis line, especially," said he, "works without a particle of friction, and the service is giving excellent satisfaction to patrons. On the College-avenue line, which has just been opened, there is some slight friction at times, owing to the number of mule-car lines that ply over the same tracks on Pennsylvania street and Massachusetts avenue. A good deal of this will be obviated, however, as soon as a few days' experience familiarizes motorists and mule-drivers with meeting places, as specified by the schedule. Once the electric car reaches College avenue the service is all that could be desired. The road-bed is solid and smooth, the power abundant, the equipment fair and of good type, and the miles an hour on the stretch is no trick at all."

"Are you not somewhat short of electric motors?" was asked.

"We are somewhat embarrassed by lack of closed motors," said Mr. Frenzel, "and we have to continue the open cars. During the daytime the open cars are all right, but of a frosty night they are somewhat exposed and uncomfortable. However, the lack of closed motors will be supplied in time. We have put in an order at St. Louis some time ago for twenty closed motors of the most approved pattern and finish. Some of them will be delivered by the first of next week. These, with the closed motors we have, will give us forty, and the Jumbo makes forty and a half, and we have trailers we need, and with the new motors that are coming our electric lines will be able to meet any demand that may be made upon us."

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